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AUTHOR Brodman, Estelle
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ABSTRACT

Many problems in developing biomedical library services for the emerging nations of Southeast Asia remain amenable only to legislation; however, IFLA seems particularly well situated to assist in these tasks. Of the numerous political and technical problems to be overcome, first and foremost are the difficulties involved in the simple transmission of information in and out of a country due to lack of publishing and distribution networks on one hand, and governmental restriction on the other. Others include absence of a biomedical research communication system, lack of published papers from and about professional meetings, lack of technical book and journal collections, and shortage of trained library staff. IFLA, being voluntary, can act as a bridge in the international community, encouraging national membership in shared informational ventures and applying persuasive pressure on members to gather and allow access to information on a quid pro quo basis. Further assistance might include the preparation and publication of national holdings of biochemical works and journals, reprography, encouragement for interlibrary loan, resolution of customs problems, advice on and preparation for computer technology, and promotion of incountry library staff training. IFLA should consider the formation of regional and even national subdivisions to promote these and other projects of mutual cooperation and communication. (EAA)

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BIOMEDICAL LIBRARY MANAGEMENT AND LEGISLATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

by

Estelle BRODMAN, Ph.D.
Librarian and Professor of Medical History
Washington University School of Medicine
St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

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Introduction

It is now almost 20 years since I first became involved with biomedical libraries in Southeast Asia, and it seems to me that in this time two important changes have occurred. First, consultants from the more developed countries to less developed ones have come to appreciate that institutions, systems, goals, and methods which are appropriate in one society may not be the optimum ones for an entirely different culture. Second, the development of automation and the ability of many of the developing nations to obtain and use automated equipment has substantially changed the possibility of advances in the transmission of biomedical information within developing countries, among such countries, and from them to the developed nations. With these changes, new possibilities for advances in biomedical libraries in Southeast Asia are theoretically possible, and I view it as the duty of such international organizations as IFLA to help with these advances.

Let me also cite another circumstance in the developing world which allows for optimism in the betterment of the transmission of scientific data. I refer to the fact that while much that is included in the work of biomedical libraries in Southeast Asia must be undertaken under governmental and especially legislative edicts, there are still a large number of possible advances in service which can be brought about by professionals working together in groups, as individuals, cutting across the boundaries of governments as well as within these boundaries. IFLA seems particularly well situated to take part in such work, since as an organization partially funded through UNESCO it can tap into governmental and international resources, and as an organization of individual libraries it can work together to do those things which are most usefully done by volunteer groups who are interested in joint ventures. It gives me great hope, therefore, to see IFLA devoting an entire annual meeting to this topic.

Although I shall talk about several things I think IFLA can do or encourage others to do, there are many more I cannot touch on. The hand-out you received when you entered the room contains a list of other possible projects; I am sure you can think of additional ones, which may be brought out during the later discussion period.

Political Problems

Let me start, then, by describing some of the legislative problems and then some of the technical problems I see as still awaiting solution in biomedical libraries in developing countries.

Perhaps first and foremost is the difficulty of getting information in and out of these countries. These difficulties are due to the infrastructure of the country on the one hand, including the absence of a publishing and distributing network, and to the

restrictions of the government on the other hand. As Artandi (1) has noted, "As we are moving toward a post-industrial knowledge society, information is recognized more and more as a resource that can be developed, controlled, and utilized." Where countries do not have active and well-working statistical bureaus, many statistics are not collected, and no amount of work on the part of outsiders will yield that data. For example, if a country does not conduct a census of its people, or conducts one in a less-than-accurate manner, it will never be able to learn how many people live there, where they live, how old they are, or any other information normally collected by censuses. On the other hand, a sovereign country may collect such data, but because of political or trade reasons, not wish to divulge this sensitive data to others. It can then interdict the publication of the data and it is unlikely that libraries will be able to put enough pressure on the government to change such laws or customs. At best, libraries within the country can only hope to raise the question of the need for such prohibitions with their own governments, and they are more likely to have some success in this endeavor if they work through such national bodies as academies of science or medicine, the university council of the country, the medical association, or a friendly legislator who can be a "front" for the libraries. Librarians who have helped scientific and legislative users obtain similar information from other countries will be one step ahead of less-helpful librarians here, since the publication of the country's data will then be seen as a trade-off, a *quid pro quo,* for data from other countries. Perhaps this is where such international bodies as the World Health Organization can be especially useful in particular countries, since they already have access to governmental bodies. Placing the country on the management board of an international data base is yet another way an international organization can alleviate the real fears of some countries about publishing their data – always remembering that each country comes into such international bodies voluntarily, and cannot be forced to do anything it does not wish to do.

We already have one international system which tries to bring together the ability of individual nations to control their own information and the ability of an international body to make such information available to people in many countries. I refer, of course, to UNISIST, officially approved by IFLA as one of its projects. As you know, this UN system obtains national data bases from individual countries and unites them with data bases from other countries -- a system which proved useful in the early 20th century western world, as exemplified by the Royal Society of London's *International Catalogue of Scientific Literature.* From 1901 to after World War I data about the scientific publications in each country were collected by that country and sent to London for unification

and publication. UNISIST proposes doing much the same thing, and to that end has published guides for the production of compatible indexes of data nationally, so that all the material received from all the countries can be put together as a unit.

It seems to me that IFLA is particularly well-equipped to work closely with UNESCO and other groups in UN to develop the UNISIST program; especially it can help by training individuals in these countries who will collect and index the material for the international community. IFLA is a bridging group which can sit in both camps -- national and international -- as I have said previously.

One of the problems which increased international indexes and data bases are likely to have, however, especially those made up of inputs from less developed countries, and particularly those going into computer stores of international information, is a lack of a tradition in many countries of accuracy and attention to details, which are such necessities in this work. IFLA could help here too, by developing training programs, with the help of UNESCO and such other UN groups as ESCAP's Clearinghouse and Information Center in Bangkok. These programs could then be translated into the local languages for use by those nationals who will be inputting the data for the international tools.

Still talking about legislative needs, let me point out another widespread problem which I believe IFLA could help to solve. It is a well-known fact that learning of the existence of a publication likely to contain information needed and yet not being able to have access to that publication is one of the most frustrating experiences a scientist can have. Could not IFLA help here by devising ways to produce lists of the holdings of various biomedical books and journals in countries and regions, so that at least it would be known where these works were stored? Then, working with the various national and governmental agencies involved, could not IFLA work to arrange for the procurement of photocopies of the necessary literature, for which the local library could be paid in UNESCO coupons. This would put into operation another official IFLA program – international interlibary loans -- and would help developing countries to avoid the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of obtaining small amounts of foreign currency. Moreover, IFLA could work with the appropriate national bodies to allow the making of these photocopies upon receipt of the order, rather than holding them until payment had been received from the borrowing library.

If IFLA did this, it might then also take on the legal question of the automatic importation of these interlibrary loans into the country, now so often held up for lengthy periods at the borders of the recipient country by customs restrictions meant for an entirely different kind of import. After all, the likelihood that a biomedical article will

contain a subversive message is almost non-existent. In this "one world," a child with kwashiorkor in one country is just as sick as a child with kwashiorkor in another country, and the treatment is not changed by the geography.

Technical Problems

Let me now go on to the more technical problems.

In many developing countries the biomedical research communication system has not been developed to where publication of research papers and clinical work is routinely to be found. In many cases papers at meetings in these countries are either never published or are printed in such small quantities or in mimeographed (cyclostyled) manner on very poor paper that they are not available to anyone but a small group of insiders. These papers have been named "fugitive publications" or "invisible literature" because they are so elusive. As Radel and Kim noted in 1976, (2) the largest amount of material from developing countries is held in developed countries, but nowhere is there a large sample of the literature from the developing areas.

The usual channel for obtaining "invisible literature" is personal contact, not institutionalized or commercialized methods; but if knowledge of one country is to be made available to other countries some system which would be likely to bring in a fairly large percentage of this valuable material must be found.

IFLA, working with local libraries and governmental groups might well aid in the collection of these "fugitive publications" so that they can be made available where they are most needed. Here, of course, the twin questions of the *right* to translate documents into and from local languages to a "bridging" language such as English, and the ability to find such translators must be addressed.

Acquisitions of the literature implies an infrastructure of stores of data -- what used to be called libraries -- and the setting up and stocking of these resources is a lengthy and expensive process, involving locating the documents, obtaining them, having a trained staff to handle them, physically storing them, and making them available for use in a number of different ways. In countries with little tradition of libraries and library users, it is difficult for government officials to approve of years of outlays of money without much visible return for their investment. Yet "instant libraries" are a vain hope, and officials must be repeatedly reminded of this at the same time that staff of libraries and information centers are trained and kept up-to-date on methods of offering the best and most appropriate service to their readers. Again I believe that IFLA can help to provide the "underpinning," without which the most promising scheme on paper comes to nought in the operation. Moreover, for the time being, such training, I believe, should be done in local and regional headquarters in developing countries, with only a little training in

the developed countries, where the resources and techniques are so very different, and the probability of dissatisfaction of the student when he returns home -- or his actual political displacement -- is so great.

The history of biomedical library advances in developed countries shows that two things are especially helpful. One is the ability of the librarians and the users of the libraries to get together face-to-face to examine problems and devise unified means of handling them; the other is success which comes with the prestige offered people who perform helping work efficiently and pleasantly.

It is a truism that people work together better when they know each other than when their counterparts are just names on paper. Experiments by Alphonse Chapanis and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University, for example, have shown that when two persons work together to solve problems, they find solutions roughly twice as fast when they communicate with speech as compared to the time taken when they communicate by other means, such as visual signaling, typing, and handwriting. Since this is so, it seems to me that IFLA might well establish national or regional subdivisions, where the members could meet regularly and at a cheaper cost than the annual meetings now held in an international capital such as this, to which only the most senior members of a library staff are likely to come. Moreover, these international meetings often have difficulties because many country's delegates think of themselves as representatives of their country, who must win honors, as if the meeting were another kind of Olympic Sports Games, rather than concentrating on working together toward a common goal. Intracountry meetings, or meetings on a regional basis, such as those held by the Southeast Asia Medical Information Center, which has held about five regional library meetings in the past few years, can bring together working groups at short intervals. Not only will the group then be able to do things as a group, but individuals within the group will learn about new methods and new tools used by others -- and learn about them in informal ways, in corridors, over coffee, or in visiting local libraries. Moreover, in many cases the problem of governmental prohibition of use of foreign currency and entrance and exit visas required by a number of developing countries would cease to be a problem.

It goes without saying, of course, that local groups know more about both the problems and the resources and governmental rules for solving these problems than do those from different social structures with different economic and political situations. By uniting these groups eventually into the international scene through regular IFLA meetings, the experiences within individual countries can be used as the basis for wider actions.

It is a well-known fact that the position of librarians within society -- both in de-

veloped and in developing countries -- is lower than librarians themselves would like to see. However, the rise of the "knowledge worker" will, I believe, gradually lead to a new social stratification system. Unfortunately, though, many of us cannot yet see the relationship between help given readers and rewards given librarians. This implies not only the willingness of librarians to work for others (their readers), but their ability to provide the information needed. Without a knowledge of where to obtain data and information, no amount of willingness will do more than convince our library users that we *want* to help; but providing data in a sullen and unpleasant manner, or keeping information a secret, is surely going to turn users away from helping librarians procure the help they need to raise their status. And if librarians wish to be given more authority, they must show that they can use what authority they do have for the good of those they are supposed to be serving. By helping to train librarians in developing countries about the cost/effectiveness of being helpers, I believe IFLA can be influencing many future generations of library users.

On the other hand, users in countries without a tradition of libraries must be informed of the services available to them through libraries. Repeated advertisement needs to be undertaken; moreover, because many users will not have had experience with such systems, it will be necessary to help them use them in much more detailed fashion than is thought necessary in some systems. This, of course, includes training the staff members who will be the intermediaries between the systems and the users -- and it is better if they are trained before the system is offered for use generally. Again I see an important role for IFLA here.

Computers

Finally I come to the question of the place of the computer in the biomedical libraries of developing countries. Let me say unequivocally that I am sure that it will come in the not too distant future -- perhaps more quickly for the searching of data bases such as MEDLINE, prepared elsewhere, than for local library catalogs, circulation systems, acquisition files, and other housekeeping chores. But as librarians in the developed countries have learned, computers are not a magic black box that will solve all the problems. (Indeed, sometimes they are more like Pandora's box!) Not only do they sometimes not solve any problem, frequently not the right problem; but they require enormous amounts of work on the part of the librarian to keep them up-to-date and to use them to their best advantage. Because the stores of biomedical data which can be searched on-line is so extensive, and because so much of it comes from outside the developing countries and therefore requires more foreign currency than many countries will be prepared to pay for widespread use, it is probable at the beginning, at any rate, all the

libraries will have to club together, designate one of them to be the center of computer-base searching, and then all work together to procure the necessary resources for this installation.

Many of the decisions here will be determined on a political basis, with the local country deciding which library it will use as its bellwether; but the technical advice which a group such as this can give -- either directly or through some other agency of the UN -- would be extremely helpful. If IFLA does not already have a committee or a taskforce of librarians from developed nations, developing nations, and international groups working on this problem, I would like to recommend that it set up such a group as quickly as possible. There is no need for libraries in developing countries to go through all the steps and all the mistakes made in libraries in the developed countries, when they can "leapfrog" from simple manual personalized systems to sophisticated computerized data base systems in a few well-chosen steps. But without the ability to chose their steps carefully, they may end up with a worse chaos than they had before.

Conclusion

One of the great poets of 20th century America, Carl Sandburg, said, "Nothing happens unless first a dream" (3). The developing countries are the world's dream for the future. It is up to the librarians of these countries to make the dream that of a better world, where the help of those who know where to look is banded together with the need of those who know what to ask. And in my opinion groups like IFLA exist for the purpose of helping the former serve the latter better in the future than they have been in the past. And finally I remind you of my favorite verse from the Talmud, "The day is short and the work is great -- It is not incumbent on thee to complete the work, but thou must not therefore cease from it." (4)

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